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For Immediate Release:  
September 18, 2008

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- NEWS RELEASE -

## **BYSIEWICZ APPLAUDS U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PASSAGE OF VETERANS VOTING SUPPORT ACT**

### VETERANS VOTING RIGHTS ONE STEP CLOSER TO BEING PROTECTED BY LAW

**HARTFORD:** Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz is pleased that last night the United State House of Representatives passed, by a voice vote, *H.R. 6625 The Veterans Voting Support Act*. The *Veterans Voting Support Act* would require the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to give election officials access to VA facilities to do the job they were constitutionally elected to do: register and educate voters wherever they are, including those who happen to be patients or residents at VA facilities or homeless shelters. It would also provide the same access to non-partisan groups who have a long history of advocacy for veterans and for the right to vote.

“While the VA has dropped its illegal, ill-conceived, and illegitimate ban on voter registration, our veterans’ voting rights should not be left up to the whim of bureaucrats in Washington,” said Bysiewicz. “I am still concerned that health care providers and V.A. staff will have too much decision-making power in determining who actually gets to vote and how groups are given access to V.A. facilities. This legislation will cut through the remaining red tape and codify those rights into law.”

On September 8, 2008 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ reversed a May 2008 directive that denied access to state and local election officials and non-partisan groups to its hospitals in order to assist VA officials in registering voters at VA facilities.

*H.R. 6625* would also empower Secretaries of State to designate VA facilities as Voter Registration Agencies under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. This designation would require VA facilities to provide assistance requesting, completing, and

delivering absentee ballots for anyone serviced by the agency. Indeed, this was VA policy for many years with no evidence whatsoever that it was disruptive to facilities or patients or that it violated the Federal Hatch Act.

In July, Secretary Bysiewicz and Washington State Secretary of State Sam Reed launched a national bipartisan effort among Secretaries of State to overturn the previous VA directive. That same month, she and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal threatened to take legal action unless the VA reversed its policy.

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Rules and Administration Committee held a hearing on the *The Veterans Voting Support Act*. Senator Dian Feinstein (D-CA), chairwoman of the committee, read testimony into the official record from Secretary Bysiewicz in support of the act.

“I am hopeful that the U.S. Senate will pass a similar measure and the President will sign this important legislation into law,” said Bysiewicz. “I want to thank Connecticut’s Congressional Delegation for leading the charge to protect our veterans voting rights.”

Secretary Bysiewicz plans to visit veterans’ facilities across Connecticut this fall to register veterans and make sure their voices are heard this November.